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The author plays the role of "devil's advocate," stating that present language teaching methods and techniques are not based on "linguistic theories." Transformation exercises, including conversations, transpositions, reductions, and expansions, were part of the language teachers' stock-in-trade fifty or a hundred years before a theory of transformational grammar was developed. It is dangerous to accept the imposition of linguistic theory as the basis of effective teaching methodology. The goal of the linguist, who works in a framework of ex-post facto analysis of data, is the description of language; the goal of the language teacher who works in a framework of experimentation where outcomes are not predictable, is the development of language skills in the learner. Those teachers who have inherited students who have passed proficiency tests in English and are unable to cope with communication in an English-speaking environment can testify to the inadequacy of the assumption that the ability of a student to reproduce the symbols of the English language is both necessary and sufficient to effective communication in English. Suggested as a focus of attention is not improvement within the present view of language teaching and learning, but the restructuring of the present view, to accomplish the goal of communication. Prime areas of research are discussed. (AMM)

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THE DISCIPLINE OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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A paper read at the Regional English Language Seminar.

Singapore

June 1969

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Introduction:

When I gratefully received from the Director of the Regional English Language Centre an invitation to attend this Seminar and to deliver one or two papers I replied by suggesting some innocuous titles that might be of some interest to participants. The Chairman of the Seminar Planning Committee then wrote to me explaining that the Seminar was to be organized into two parts, the first being devoted to a consideration of the various linguistic theories on which language teaching methods are based, and the second on the application of these theories in the language classroom. It was then that I decided to play the role of the devil's advocate and present this paper, being sure that few or none of you will agree with its contents but nonetheless convinced that it is time for we teachers of English as a second language to come to grips more adequately with our field and define clearly the objectives, purposes and areas of research peculiar to our field.

I do not believe that language teaching methods and techniques are based on linguistic theories. Transformation exercises including conversions, transpositions, reduction and expansion exercises were part of the language teachers stock-in-trade fifty or a hundred years before a theory of transformational grammar was developed. If any set of language teaching materials ought to illustrate a particular linguistic theory it is the Michigan materials. Produced in the flush of popularity and enthusiasm for American structuralism, these materials feature pattern practice as a teaching procedure consonant with the emphasis on teaching sentence patterns which were predicted to be problems for the learner. And yet in these materials one finds an abundance of transformation, reduction and expansion exercises.

Moreover, pattern practice as a teaching procedure was not developed at the time by the linguists who developed the Michigan materials but by Harold Palmer and others before him in the early part of the Twentieth Century.

However, not only is it erroneous to think of language teaching methodology as developing from or depending on linguistic theory but, I believe, it is dangerous for us to accept the imposition of linguistic theory as the basis of effective teaching methodology. Charles Fries pointed out in 1958 that "What we have learned is not a 'new method' nor a set of new techniques of teaching. It is a new understanding of the facts of language itself - a new understanding that can help us measure the effectiveness of the various methods that we have already"[1].

It is timely to remind ourselves that this 'new understanding of the facts of language itself' condemned and made unfashionable, the now fashionable transformation exercises.

I recognize the oversimplification of these facile statements of mine but at the same time it seems to me that we teachers of English as a second language must accept responsibility for our being tossed this way and that in the sea of linguistic fashions because we have not defined clearly for ourselves the nature and purposes of our endeavour. The nature and purposes of our endeavour differ fundamentally from those of the linguists even though the latter may provide the prime sources of information, our raw material, if you will call it that, for us. The linguist's goal is the description of language (or to put it another way, the description of what it is that someone knows when we say that he knows a language). The language teacher's goal is the development of language skills in the learner. It is not simply the acquisition of the language that the linguist describes. The linguist

works in a framework of ex-post facto analysis of data. The language teacher works in a framework of experimentation where outcomes are not predictable. Our modes of operation and our goals are quite different.

It is not only appropriate but necessary at this stage for us to define clearly our objectives and the framework within which we are to work. We must recognize ourselves as a community of scholars with related but clearly differing goals and activities from other communities of scholars. We are a community of scholars within the discipline of teaching English as a second language. It is that discipline which I would like to make a first halting attempt to describe, not so much in terms of contemporary practice but in terms of a theoretical framework which can provide the context that makes our work not only distinguishable from other disciplines but purposeful in terms of the goals we set ourselves.

Part I: Academic Disciplines:

A dictionary will define a discipline as a branch of learning. This simple classification does not reflect the plethora of books and years of disputation that has taken place in the history and philosophy of learning attempting to categorize the universe of knowledge. To Aristotle the three classes of disciplines, the theoretical, the practical and the productive existed in terms of a hierarchy of goodness with the three theoretical disciplines Physics, Mathematics and Theology the highest. To Descartes there was no division of the universe of knowledge into separate disciplines. There are as many structures proposed as writers attempting to structure the universe of knowledge but one cannot help but be impressed in reading the history of discussion of academic disciplines by the arbitrary ways and the differing criteria used to classify disciplines. In modern times, if we attempt to pursue a more precise statement we come acorss a division

between those who emphasize the subject matter of the discipline and those who emphasize the members of a discipline. Broudy, for example delineates four crucial aspects of a discipline as,

> "1. Terminology or concepts that are shorthand names for very complex, abstract thought processes.
>
> 2. A whole network of data, facts, rules, generalizations and theories that have been more or less satisfactorily proved in the history of the discipline.
>
> 3. A method of investigation in some sense peculiar to itself.
>
> 4. Rules for evaluating evidence."[2]

To Broudy then a discipline is characterised by identifiable academic pursuits. To others, a discipline is identified by the scholars who recognize common academic pursuits. King and Brownell, for example, argue that "The disciplines of knowledge are not clearly described as areas of study or of knowledge, but metaphorically as communities of scholars who share a domain of intellectual inquiry or discourse."[3] These communities of scholars are not isolated and identifiable in negative terms of exclusion but they do share common goals and strive to bring more understanding knowledge and meaning to these common goals. There are certainly scholars who belong to more than one community because knowledge exists as an interlocking continuum in which, to borrow a Pikeian analogy, particle, wave and field interact without reference to the arbitrary boundaries imposed by men.

A discipline begins as a branch or sub-system of an associated discipline, but not always the same associated discipline. Many who would nowadays classify themselves as working within the discipline of Linguistics began their scholarship in the disciplines

of Anthropology or English. But when there is a sufficiently large community of scholars, when there is a sufficiently large literature and teaching and an organization within the community of scholars which generates a freely flowing exchange of information, there develops a hiving-off process and the discipline is given an identity of its own. It is often the case that at this stage the new discipline begins to impose rigorous standards of membership and a restriction of subject matter. It sloughs off those branches which cannot meet the new rigorous framework it has set - as when Linguistics parted with Semantics.

Those of us who are gathered here possibly at the moment, identify with a variety of disciplines but we all share a committment to the furthering of knowledge in the field of teaching English as a second language. Those of us who come from Universities live under the differing umbrellas of English, Education, Linguistics, Speech and Foreign Languages but most of us have as our prime interest and identity, the teaching of English as a second language. It is of interest to us to note that the University of Hawaii has recently created a separate and independent Department of English as a Second Language within the College of Arts and Sciences. (I recently showed some of my colleagues at the University of Hawaii an index card on which were written the names of ten Departments within the College of Arts and Sciences, e.g. Biology, Botany, Zoology, Chemistry, Linguistics, Music, etc.. They were unanimous in agreeing that all these were disciplines but when I added English as a Second Language many of them baulked - I wonder if, after a few years of seeing this name in the University Catalogue, they will still baulk).

The teaching of English as a second language has then a sizable band of committed scholars working internationally "to bring [to quote again King and Brownell] the development of its domain or field to a continually higher and more fruitful state of knowledge and meaning".[4]

We have specialist organizations with membership and publications through which communication about our field is fostered and facilitated. We are an instructive community in that we pass on our findings through teaching to other scholars. In some institutions of higher learning students may gain a doctorate in the field of teaching English as a second language while in many more such institutions Masters Degrees and post-graduate Diplomas are offered.

The single characteristic that our field lacks as a discipline is an adequate theoretical framework which will clearly define our common goals and purposes as distinct from those of other disciplines. This will inevitably develop as more scholars work intensively in our field but I believe that it is incumbent on us at this time to provide the guidance for new scholars by commencing to sketch, even though inadequately at this stage, lines of research or areas of fruitful investigation which will contribute to a more adequate definition of our discipline. To this end I would like to suggest that we look at our discipline from two points of view; a macro view by which we could see the oversall pursuit of those goals, and a micro view by which we could see the specific tasks within the systems and sub-systems that form the structure of our discipline, tasks which will be peculiarly geared to our needs and purposes as teachers of English as a second language.

Part II: A Theoretical Framework for TESL: A Macro View.

We would all agree, I believe, that we teach English as a Second Language in order that our students may communicate with others by using the English language. Our overall goal is communication, either speech communication or print communication and thus our theoretical framework will have as its focus an investigation of models of communication in which English is the medium of communication.

In the field of teaching and learning English as a second language we have in the main so far assumed that the acquisition of the symbols of language and production of the symbols of language by a learner are necessary and sufficient for communication in that language. Although we profess to teach language as communication we rarely engage our students in purposeful communication. Our measures of proficiency in English reflect our teaching view that language learning is knowing how to respond with accuracy to given cues or to produce well formed sentences from linguistic or contextual cues.

Those of us who have inherited students who have passed proficiency tests in English but are unable to cope with communication in an English speaking environment can testify to the inadequacy of our assumption that the ability of a student to reproduce the symbols of the English language is both necessary and sufficient to effective communication in English. Universities in countries where English is spoken as the mother tongue have had to set up programmes where students with "perfect" ability to reproduce the symbols of English (i.e. those who would score 100+% on our tests) are taught to communicate. When we compare the background experiences in using English of these students with those of students for whom English is a second language we have good reason to be concerned about our second language teaching goals.

What I am suggesting as a focus for our discipline is not improvement within the present view of language teaching and language learning, (more and better of the same thing) but the restructuring of our view to accomplish what we say is our goal - communication through language with prime emphasis on communication. We will want to intensively investigate the attributes of models of communication and describe fully the systems and sub-systems which cause them to operate (or

alternatively to break down). We will want to know about models in which more than two persons are communicating. We will want to know about models in which one person is a native speaker of English while the other (or others) are non-native speakers and models in which both or all persons are non-native speakers.

In any situation of communication there is a purpose or outcome superordinate to either the acquisition or the use of linguistic symbols. Communication is task oriented and if our goal of teaching English as a second language is communication the learning situations that we structure ought to be task oriented. We require more of our learner than the acquisition of the linguistic skills that are the medium of communication. We require of him the manipulation of all the systems and sub-systems that may have to be present in a communication situation, including but not exclusively the system of language, to accomplish some task.

In the teaching English as a second language we are in the business of organizing potentials for behaviour in perceived sets and not the business of organizing the cognition of sign systems in the head. These are not identical forms of business.

A theoretical model then, from a macro point of view, will structure teaching and learning contexts in terms of an overall model of communication. One of the primary tasks of our discipline will be to investigate the systems and sub-systems of the model including linguistic, para-linguistic (e.g. subject matter, tasks etc.) and non-linguistic (e.g. seating arrangements) aspects that are integral parts of communication systems. In the investigation of this model the members of our discipline will draw upon the research findings of other and related disciplines, primarily Linguistics, Information Theory, Psychology, Anthropology and Education but the research findings in these disciplines will act only as starting points, as raw material which we must re-structure, submit to investigation and confirm or modify in terms of our goals of communication and the interaction of the

systems and sub-systems which enable a learner to communicate using English as a second language.

PART III: A Theoretical Framework for TESL: A Micro View.

It is appropriate for a discipline to have a body of theory, a philosophy about which members of the discipline can discourse. Such a body of theory in the discipline of TESL might exist in the macro view of a theory of teaching English as a second language as outlined above. There are those of our colleagues who believe that TESL dissipates at higher levels of theorising into the many related disciplines that make contributions to our common field of knowledge. There are those of our colleagues who believe that there is no worthwhile or definitive field of higher level study of TESL, comparable with, for example the philosophy of language. Such of our colleagues look at TESL as a service field rather than a discipline but I would contend that TESL affords us the opportunity of the highest level of abstract theorising if only we would recognize our discipline for what it is - an independent but interdependent field which offers in such a macro view as that inadequately described above a philosophical framework of theory that on the one hand draws upon related disciplines while on the other has goals, purposes and procedures for investigation which differ from these disciplines.

The differences between the goals, purposes and procedures of the discipline of TESL and those of other related disciplines may be seen more clearly if we take a micro view of our theoretical framework to see how the investigation of one of the systems or sub-systems operating within a model of communication might be treated. The system that I wish to look at in some detail is the system of language for it not only affords us an opportunity to view the differences between the goals and procedures of TESL and those of Linguistics but it is the system that has in some parts of the world subsumed our discipline leading to, I believe, unfortunate consequences.

As a starting point let me offer you two views of what language is, the one seeming to reflect a linguists view, the other seeming to reflect more closely what we might consider language as it functions within a TESL framework.

A language is an arbitrary system of vocal symbols and signals which humans use to communicate.

Such a definition of language with its emphasis on the systems of vocal symbols has been common in Linguistics books for some time. Such statements are usually followed by describing the linguist's work as the scientific description of the system of arbitrary symbols.

Clyde Kluckhohn on the other hand, wrote that:

> "language is an instrument for action. The meaning of a word or phrase is not its dictionary equivalent but the difference its utterance brings about in a situation. We use words to comfort and cajole ourselves in fantasy and daydream, to let off steam, to goad ourselves into one type of activity and to deny ourselves another. We use words to promote our own purposes in dealing with others ... Even the most intellectual of intellectuals employs only a minute fraction of his total utterance in symbolizing and communicating ideas that are divorced from emotion and action. The primary social value of speech lies in getting individuals to work more effectively together and in easing social tensions."5

In the discipline of TESL with its focus on task oriented communications we might more profitably view language not so much as a system of signals and symbols but rather as a vehicle for action - as an instrument which causes responses which in turn generate further responses in social environments. Inherent in the contrasting emphases in these two views of language lies the fundamental difference between the way the linguist looks at language and the way we might profitably look at language. Some specific examples of how these differences in definition lead to differences of approach may help to illustrate this point.

Linguists researching the sub-system of language that we label Acoustic Phonetics are able to make ranges of measurement of audition and phonation which provide data of interest and significance to the linguist. Some of this information is of value to us and yet some is of no value in that it deals with measurements below the threshold of possible human perception. This investigation of language represents one kind of difference - In TESL we make selection of linguistic data on the basis of whether or not it can be significant in human communication.

The sub-system of Phonology provides us with an example of a different type of selection and use of findings of linguistic research. Structural Linguists found that in the English language there are four levels of contrastive stress. But because quartanary stress is an attribute of the native speaker of English, does this make it per se a selectable item for teaching English as a second language? You may not be taking me seriously when I ask this question but let me assure you that it is a real question. A team of language teachers spent three months in Turkey trying to teach quartanary stress in English to a group of students. They failed of course but how much more fruitful would their three months have been if they tried to teach their students to communicate in English. These language teachers attributed to quartanary stress the same importance in the signalling system of English as any other signal.

The abovementioned example does of course represent excessive zeal in the application of linguistic findings to language teaching and there are few of us who would be foolish enough to do such a thing. Or are there? We certainly know a lot more about the English language than we would want to pass on to students of English as a second language. But it is not the minutiae of linguistic description that worries me but the principle, in major crucial areas of the English language, that we in TESL are in the habit of simply accepting descriptions of English

and incorporating them into language teaching programmes without having investigated them for (what the economist might call) their marginal utility in terms of the acquisition of language for communication.

A native speaker of English uses the determiners 'a' and 'the' contrastively in noun clusters. We have a great deal of linguistic description which identifies the contexts within which such contrasts are made. Teachers of English as a second language have taken these descriptions and incorporated them into teaching materials. A great deal of work has been carried out organizing sequences of lessons whereby students may learn where to use 'a' and where to use 'the'. Teachers spend a great deal of time teaching this contrast but even the most optimistic teacher must admit that results are anything but encouraging and that it takes a great deal of time and effort and carefully planned practice to develop the habit. Is it worth the effort or would our time and effort be better spent on developing other language skills so far as communication is concerned?

It is <u>not</u> worth it simply because native speakers make the contrast. This would be saying the same thing as quartanary stress is worth teaching because native speakers use it. Our discipline of TESL must take the findings of descriptive linguistics and submit them to investigations in terms of our model of communication before we can determine the 'worth' or the 'value' of including the teaching of some aspects of the English language in a second language teaching programme.

Beginning with the information that the a/the contrast exists in English we would want to determine experimentally whether or not this contrast is crucial for language as communication. It is not sufficient for us to say, "Is it correct to use this form or the other form?" We might better ask, "Does the incorrect use of the a/the contrast cause communication to break down in a multiplicity of contexts?"

Unless we can provide answers to questions such as this we have nothing but a subjective or impressionistic basis for including or excluding any item or of arranging priorities for such items in selecting and organizing language content in a language teaching programme. The criterion of whether or not a native speaker of English uses it is obviously not satisfactory. Nor is the criterion of frequency of use alone satisfactory.

William Mackey provides a valuable viewpoint of information about language for our purposes when he writes:

> "Items in a language differ in how closely they are linked into a system and how easy it is to dispense with them. Some items are therefore more selectable than others. Selectability depends ultimately on what one can eliminate and still have a language, and on the degree to which one can do without it in a given circumstance. The selectability of any item is inversely proportional to its restrictability, that is, to the capacity of the language to do without it."[6]

Unfortunately Mackey talks about the relevance of items in a language to the structure of language itself. The development of such a selectability/restrictability matrix in terms of the value in communication of items in English would be an invaluable contribution to knowledge about our field and it is in such a way that our discipline would treat the findings of descriptive linguistics. We depend on the linguist for some of the raw material that we work with, just as we depend upon the educator, the psychologist, the anthropologist and the communication systems analyst. But we must not accept as the finished product the raw material that we deal with.

In the discipline of TESL there will be members who work in the field of language description. These members will be conducting linguistic research but towards a different goal and for a different purpose from those conducting linguistic research aimed at describing the structure of the English language. The difference between these two types of linguistic research will resemble the difference between descriptive and experimental phonetics, the former aimed at describing features, the latter aimed at determining responses to varying stimuli. We want to know that 'a' and 'the' exist and contrast in the English language but we only want to know that as a starting point. For purposes of determining whether or not to include the teaching of this contrast in beginning English as a second language teaching materials we will want to know the behaviours or consequences for persons communicating with each other of the non-contrastive use of 'a' and 'the'. If our research shows us that the inaccurate use of the contrast rarely causes communication to breakdown, i.e. rarely causes people to be unable to complete a task, then we do not assign a high priority to this item. We can think of innumerable other examples of linguistic data which need such investigation. In a discipline where time available is a major variable the concept of marginal utility for communication of items in the system of language is one which should receive the highest priority from investigators and members of the discipline.

Part IV: Research in the Discipline of TESL.

An academic discipline will, according to Broudy have "a method of investigation in some ways peculiar to itself".[7] This only partly covers the field of research for appropriate research considerations for any discipline may be categorized firstly in terms of the type of research to be carried out - the research techniques or processes of investigation and secondly of the specific areas of research peculiar to the discipline. Research in the discipline of TESL may be differentiated from other fields in both of these ways.

To begin then with research techniques appropriate to TESL. Let me again compare these to the research techniques of the linguist. Although I am on highly controversial ground here, ground which itself needs much more thorough investigation, let me say that linguistic research approaches ex-post facto research while TESL research is very clearly experimental research. While generative grammarians calm their apoplexy let me say that when Chomsky talks about "the child's discovery of what from a formal point of view is a deep and abstract theory - a generative grammar of his language."[8] I interpret this to mean the pre-existence of a linguistic structure - an outcome which is already fixed and pre-determined against which any utterance may be measured and judged as well formed or not well formed, acceptable or not acceptable etc. etc..

Psycholinguists have been grappling with this problem in that they see a fundamental difference between their approach to language acquisition and the approach of the linguist. As Margaret Donaldson pointed out rather coyly at the Edinburgh Psycholinguists Conference in 1966,

> "I am concerned that our understanding of some of the crucial features of the acquisition process may be hindered if we fall too readily into a way of talking that assimilates them to the activities of the linguist."[9]

In that TESL is concerned with the acquisition of language as a vehicle of communication our research techniques will differ from those of the linguist. Our research will be experimental research in which we are unable to predict the outcomes. We are perhaps even further back than any other discipline in that we have yet to formulate in terms of the goals of our discipline those preliminary experiments which will lead to the formulation of hypotheses to be investigated.

The linguist may, and does conduct experimental research but where he does the outcomes are validated in terms of a pre-existing structure in a native speaker of the language being investigated, perhaps "a deep and abstract theory - a generative grammar of his language", by which the native speaker is able to confirm or deny the findings of the experimental research. There is no such pre-conceived structure to validate the results of TESL research. Outcomes are only more or less effective or efficient in reaching arbitrarily defined goals of performance.

One way of classifying areas of research in which TESL might be particularly interested would be to look at any research conducted within the discipline as either "model" or "system" research on the one hand or action research on the other.

Model research would undertake investigations of features of the systems and sub-systems which make up the model of communication in English as a second language. The processing of linguistic data in terms of communication described in the micro view above would be model research. So too would be the research of L.S. Harms in investigating two-person learning programmes for speech communication,[10] particularly that part of his research which deals with communication between two person of dissimilar linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Action research would be experimental research originating from and carried out within the classroom. This research would be concerned with techniques of teaching and learning and cover all areas of English language teaching - oral and printed language and the presentation and practice aspects of language teaching. Major research projects might investigate for example, strategies for effective organization of students for presentation and practice of new materials. But the prime value from action research will accrue from reports of innovations

in procedure of a very limited nature that teachers have found to be effective. One of the most depressing features of teaching technique in our discipline is the lack of variety, the lack of experimentation in classroom techniques of teaching. There is an urgent need for teacher education programmes to place more emphasis on the art of teaching and less on background theoretical knowledge which is more appropriate for the materials writer or curriculum expert.

Another way of defining the areas of research appropriate to our discipline is by classifying the needed answers to research questions in terms of the perspectives of teaching and learning. Such a classification might isolate areas of research including the teacher, the learner, the materials (methodology), the curriculum, and the teaching/learning environment.

Research focussed on the teacher might investigate teacher roles in the classroom, the qualities of a good teacher education programme (how necessary is it for teachers to comply with the M.L.A. criterion of being able to do partial comparative and contrastive analyses?). Research focussed on the learner might thoroughly investigate optimal ages for beginning second language learning, the role of the mother tongue in learning English as a second language.

But this latter type of classification does not meet the needs of this paper. We are all aware of the types of pragmatic research needed in our field; any classroom teacher can list problems of language learning and language teaching that need investigation. This paper purposes to classify these in terms of a theory for our discipline and I believe that in terms of a theoretical framework for research we will best structure increased knowledge of the <u>model</u> or <u>system</u> of communication itself or to the functioning of this model - its action.

Part V: Conclusions

This paper has attempted to look at the teaching and learning of English as a second language within a context, which although recognizing the contributions of many related fields determines goals, purposes and strategies which are unique. The attempt has been made on the basis of my own failure as a teacher and text book writer to adequately come to grips with the field of teaching English as a second language; that is, a failure to prepare adequately my students for communicating in the English language. In attempting to diagnose this failure I conclude that it is not a cognitive failure - my students have not failed to meet the standards set by the examinations that have been set them to determine their 'proficiency in the English language'. Their mastery of sign systems is good and this has been shown in both tests designed internally at our institutions and internationally (e.g. by scores on the T.O.E.F.L. tests). The failure is behavioural. My students have not been trained in the behaviours of communication - they have been trained in language skills and these are not the same thing.

Let me conclude by again emphasising that we in the discipline of teaching English as a second language are in the business of organizing potentials for behaviour in perceived sets and not the business of organizing cognition of sign systems in the head. There is a need, I believe to put our business on a sounder footing by clarifying our objectives and purposes and developing teaching and learning strategies which will accomplish those objectives and purposes.

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